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OCHN Recognizes National Black History Month

OAKLAND COUNTY, MI (February 1, 2024) – In recognition of “National Black History Month,” Oakland Community Health Network (OCHN) honors the rich history and heritage of African Americans and their undeniable and continuing contributions to our Country and its collective culture. African American history is a broad portion of the tapestry of American history and comprises achievements in every field of endeavor including, military service, education, science and technology, law, politics, business, the arts and beyond.

In 1976, President Gerald Ford recognized “Black History Month”, and in 1986, the U.S. Congress and Senate designated the month of February as “National Black History Month”. The 2024 theme for Black History month is “African Americans and the Arts”. OCHN salutes the pioneering and creative spirit of cultural changemakers such as Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, James Baldwin, Prince and Aretha Franklin. There is a wealth of contributions from African American culture that were and continue to be foundational to many uniquely American art forms such as Jazz, Blues, Gospel, Hip Hop and Rock and Roll. In many ways, this month is a celebration of the fact that we are greater together than we are apart.

However, “National Black History Month” reminds us all that much of the history that has been written is punctuated with racial trauma. OCHN lifts our voice through impactful civic engagement to address the persistent social injustices and inequalities that are also part of American history and continue to be a part of the reality of today. National Black History Month is not a condemnation of what is or what was but a celebration of how ordinary people made extraordinary change in our society and are able to do so still.

Whether the pain be physical, emotional, or psychological, racial trauma can affect anyone, regardless of age, education, or gender. To address racial trauma, it is important to create a safe space to talk about race and address your own biases and experiences.

Additionally, OCHN provides Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training and educational opportunities for its employees and service provider network. The goal is to cultivate a culturally competent and sensitive service delivery system that promotes dignity and protects the rights of all people including marginalized populations.

“As a community behavioral health organization, it’s important to educate and address mental health in the African American community – in February and throughout the year,” states OCHN’s Executive Director and CEO, Dana Lasenby. “Recognizing and addressing racial trauma can inspire meaningful conversations that promote change and create pathways to improvement in mental health outcomes,” added Lasenby.

Below are informational resources to learn more about African American mental health and wellness:

- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) highlights the African American Mental Health page with stories, resources, and statistics related to mental health and the African American community, including ways to find help. Learn more [here](#).
- Mental Health America (MHA) features a comprehensive guide to Black & African American Communities and Mental Health with information related to attitudes, demographics, treatment issues, educational and help-related resources. Learn more [here](#).
- View the 29+ ways to celebrate Black History Month developed by OCHN’s Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Committee [here](#).

About OCHN

OCHN is contracted by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to manage and fund a service provider network for approximately 29,000 Oakland County residents at more than 400 service sites across the county. People who receive public behavioral health services through OCHN's provider network include those who have an intellectual or developmental disability, mental health concerns, or substance use disorder. Most of these individuals have Medicaid insurance coverage.

OCHN's goal is to ensure these individuals are aware of and have access to services and supports that will improve their health and quality of life, as well as ensure their engagement in full community participation. Its mission to “inspire hope, empower people, and strengthen communities” reflects an unyielding belief in a “Valuable System for Valued People.” Programs and supports provided by OCHN's service network are available at www.oaklandchn.org.

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